

[Marriage Match]

Yiddish Tales Dup.

FOLKLORE

NEW YORK

FORM C Text of Interview (Unedited)

STATE New York

NAME OF WORKER Emanuel Verschleiser

ADDRESS 1419 Jessup Ave., Bronx, New York City

DATE August 31, 1938

SUBJECT A TALE ABOUT A MARRIAGE MATCH

Our family was aristocratic, we had many rabbis in our family. My mother especially was very proud of our noble lineage (Yiches). She was a proud and energetic woman. My father was a quiet man. When not occupied with his business he was poring over his pious books. Even the writer of the Torahs (Holy Scrolls), with whose son I fell in love, was below our station. A tailor or shoemaker was something utterly degrading.

When I was 13 or 14 a match was arranged for me with the son of the Harkabi family, considered one of the most important families among the Jews. I was in love with the writer of the Torahs' son and didn't want to hear about the match. But nobody listened to me. I cried and cried. My sister was the one who arranged the match. Everything was arranged. Linen was ordered from Lodz for the trousseau, my sister was to give me a

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servant for a year as marriage gift. The Tnoim (marriage contract) were to be signed at my sister's house where the bridegroom and the bride were to meet. I cried: "I don't want", but they refused to listen to me. At the last minute, when I absolutely refused and said I will never go with him under the Chuppa (bridal canopy) my father became very angry and called me loose woman 2 (Chazufah) and hit me. Then they sent in the rabbi to talk to me. He said: My child, why dont you want to marry him, he comes from such a famous family and he is a scholar. I answered: I don't love him. The rabbi was astounded. What do you mean love him? You will love him later when you are married. When still refused, he asked me in a fatherly voice if something, God forbid, happened to me (I later understand he meant if I was not with child with the Torah writer's son, who they told him I was in love with.) He argued with me and I did not give in. Then my sister came in and beat me. The match came to naught. I later married the Torah writer's son but became disappointed soon after the marriage and we didn't live happily.

***** A FOLKTALE ABOUT A "CANTONIST"

I was looking out through the window. It was a clear snowy morning a carriage stopped at our door and a gentleman stepped out and came in to our house. I was not surprised because many christian gentlemen came to our house. My father was dealing in hemp which he bought up from the local estates and sent off to far places, even Germany. We lived in the provincial county seat of Wietebesk. The gentleman began to inquire of my father about his family, how many brothers he had and all the history of his family. My mother was scared and told my father. "I beg you, guard your tongue, you are always talking...". And after some more talk, when father asked the gentleman why all those questions, the stranger fell on my father's neck, saying; "I am your brother." He was one 3 of the "Cantonists". And he told us his whole history: When he was a child he was caught by the Czar catchers, taken with many other Jewish children; taken far away to be brought up as a Russian soldier and a Christian. But he never forgot that he was a Jew. He had talent as a musician and so was given musical education and became later a famous pianist. When he became a free man he made many times inquiries about his family

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because he never forgot that he is a Jew. At last he found his family and he is happy, and he wants to remain with us, he said, and become a Jew again. My mother had some fears but my father overcame them. The man remained in our house and returned to the Jewish faith.

My sister, a young girl of eighteen, fell in love with him. He was a man in his fifties but there was something compelling, inspiring in the man... She wanted to marry him. My father and mother were in despair. They threatened and cried, but nothing helped. She went away with him, married him. Although he formally returned to the Jewish faith, my father considered him a Christian and he sat Shiva (seven-day mourning) and tore his clothing, as is the Jewish custom, when somebody died. For him his daughter was dead.

She lived with him in Riga. She had with him two children. When she gave birth to the second child she died in milk-fever" (milk in her breasts became poisoned). In her death agonies she cried that God punished her because she married a christian.

At the time of Czar Nicolai I, small Jewish children were caught in the streets, taken into far Russian provinces, brought up as christians and given to the army. They were called "Cantonists". Many stories grew up about them, relating dramatic reunions, return to the Jewish faith, etc.

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Told to the reviewer by Mrs. D. Rivlin, of Union Square Hotel, at the cafeteria "crusader Crusader", where interviewer had a few talks with her. Woman over sixty, of gentle manners.